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ABSTRACT

Each year since 1993 the Teachers College at Emporia State University (Kansas) has placed 20 to 30 of its senior elementary education students in Professional Development School (PDS) sites in selected elementary schools. In the Emporia State PDS model, faculty from a public elementary school collaborate with faculty from the university to provide preservice teachers with instruction and practice in acquiring the skills and attitudes needed for effective teaching. The preservice teachers complete their methods classes and student teaching in a year-long clinical program that is completely field-based and involves ongoing, active, collaboration between the elementary school faculty and university faculty. Support from the elementary school is essential to the success of the PDS program and skilled mentor teachers are required. The elementary school faculty and administrators provide instruction and evaluation as well as professional and personal support. Preservice teachers are made a part of the school sites by inclusion in staff meetings and social events, and they receive defined expectations from school faculty and the principal. Preservice teachers are also encouraged to form informal support groups among themselves, and they are given opportunities for group work and development of group interaction skills. (JLS)

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Strategies for Creating and Maintaining a Collaborative Community in a Professional Development School Setting

ED 408 261

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Description of the Emporia State University Professional Development School Program

Since the fall of 1993, The Teachers College at Emporia State University has placed 20 to 30 of its senior elementary education students in Professional Development School (PDS) sites in selected public schools. The PDS program is a collaborative effort between The Teachers College, Olathe Unified School District 233, and Emporia Unified School District 253.

In the Emporia State PDS model, faculty from a public elementary school collaborate with faculty from the university to provide interns with instruction and practice in acquiring the skills and attitudes needed for effective teaching in a 100 per cent field-based setting. The interns enrolled in the PDS program complete their methods classes and student teaching in a year-long clinical program which involves on-going collaboration between the public school faculty and university faculty. The PDS model seeks to develop future teachers who are Critical Thinkers, Creative Planners, and Effective Practitioners.

The PDS interns are selected for the PDS program collaboratively by university and public school personnel involved in the PDS program. An on-site coordinator, who is a member of the elementary education faculty at Emporia State University, is assigned to each PDS school site to coordinate learning experiences for students. The coordinators work with the mentor teachers, university faculty, and interns to assure a quality experience for each intern.

For the first three years, of the PDS program at Emporia State, two elementary schools in the Olathe Unified School District served as PDS sites. In the 1996-97 school year, a third site was added in the Olathe School District, and the William Allen White Elementary School

site was added in the Emporia School District. For the 1997-98 school year, four sites will be utilized in Olathe and two sites will be utilized in Emporia, with approximately five interns at each site.

Description of William Allen White Elementary School

William Allen White Elementary School is one of seven public elementary schools in Emporia, Kansas, a community of 25,000 approximately people which is located between Kansas City and Wichita. The school is a neighborhood school serving approximately 280 students in grades kindergarten through fourth. The school serves a diverse student population that is approximately 55 per cent White, 25 per cent Hispanic, 13 per cent Black, and 7 per cent Asian. One in four students speaks a language other than English.

The school prides itself on strong instruction featuring cooperative learning, hands-on instruction, and thematic teaching. The staff views the school as an ideal setting for children to learn to work and play together despite differences of race, ethnicity, language, and ability.

The philosophy of the faculty of William Allen White Elementary School is that elementary students need appropriate boundaries and guidance provided by caring adults to grow. Three affective programs at the school are specifically designed to accomplish this outcome: Words of Wisdom, Peer Mediation, and Self-Managers.

In the Words of Wisdom program, a word of the month is chosen by the principal and staff which exemplifies an important virtue. Examples include honesty, self-control, fairness, and responsibility. The principal and staff discuss the word of the month with students, reinforce the word with songs, poems, stories, and other examples of the word, and note appropriate student behaviors which they observe.

The Peer Mediation program involves students in helping other students to settle small disputes which occur on the playground. Fourth grade students are selected for the Peer Mediation program and receive training in mediation techniques. The students are then available to other students to assist in resolving low-level disagreements.

The Self Manager program was originated during the 1996-97 school year. Students at any grade level can apply to become self-managers if they feel their behavior and attitude are consistent with the goals of the Self Manager program. Signatures are required from faculty and staff members and parents supporting the student application. Students who are identified as Self Managers are required to wear a specially designed pin every day at school and participate in a number of special activities during the school year.

The Need for Community

Creating and maintaining a community among the PDS interns is an important task of the PDS school site, of the PDS coordinator, and of the PDS interns themselves. In a professional community, interns work together to make sure the PDS experience is successful for each intern by contributing their specific talents and strengths.

Communities can provide PDS interns with opportunities to learn from each another and to take appropriate responsibility for the learning of others. Collaborative interaction in a community helps students work with others who learn differently. (NCPTLA, 1995.)

In school settings, professional communities have desirable benefits. Student learning improves when professionals are clear and consistent about the objectives and methods of learning. The technical competence of teachers improves when teachers work together, participate in reflective dialogue, and observe and react to one another's teaching. Finally,

shared purpose can lead to shared responsibility for the success of the learning enterprise by focusing participants and providing social support. (CORS, 1995).

In the PDS community, students work together to learn the content of each methods class and to apply the content appropriately to their PDS assignments. This collaboration includes studying together, tutoring other interns who may be experiencing difficulties, and collaborating on projects when appropriate.

The PDS community also provides interns with opportunities for discussion and for non-threatening reflection on intern performance. By meeting together regularly during the PDS school day and outside the school setting, interns developed trusting relationships which serve as models of collegiality for the interns in future school environments.

Finally, the PDS community supports each member emotionally. Interns in the William Allen White PDS program reported that each intern went through some sort of personal crisis at some point in the PDS program, and that the support of peers was invaluable in working through that crisis. Interns also reported that the stresses of the demanding PDS program were eased by being able to talk openly to peers who were understanding and sympathetic.

Role of the School in Creating and Maintaining the PDS Community

Support from the elementary school staff is essential to the success of a PDS program. At the school level, skilled mentor teachers are needed. The mentor teachers in the Emporia PDS volunteer to be mentor teachers and are selected by the PDS Coordinator and the school principal. Mentor teachers participate in three days of training each year. Training sessions include such topics as presentations by Emporia State University faculty on the curriculum interns are experiencing in methods classes and instruction in supervision strategies for

mentors.

Acceptance by other members of the school staff who are not participating as mentor teachers is also important to the success of the PDS program. At William Allen White School, the entire faculty voted on the question of becoming a PDS school site. In addition to the mentor teachers, interns also observed and interacted with the music teacher, the physical education teacher, the librarian, and the English as a Second Language teacher.

Specific strategies used at William Allen White to make interns a part of the staff included:

1. Involve the interns in staff inservice meetings. At the beginning of school, the interns were introduced to other staff members at an initial staff inservice session. The interns participated with school faculty in sharing expectations, dreams, and goals for the school year.

2. Involve interns in social events. At William Allen White, interns were invited to the staff back-to-school social and the interns participated in a number of social get togethers with mentors.

3. Clarify expectations for the interns. Interns need to be aware of the unique culture and specific expectations for staff at the PDS site. At William Allen White, interns met with the principal to discuss the expectations of the school, as well as requirements of district policy and state law relating to the interns' work in the classroom. Mentor teachers met together and developed a uniform set of minimum expectations for each intern before the interns began.

4. Serve as instructors for the interns. The most important role of the faculty and

principal in the Emporia State University PDS program is as information providers. This includes formal instruction on such topics as legal issues and religion in schools and informal instruction. Demonstration lessons taught by mentor teachers served as the basis for application of ideas and information from university methods courses, and intern critiques of the demonstration lessons were evaluated by the appropriate mentor teacher and methods professor.

Informal instruction is provided daily on a one-on-one basis as mentors answer intern questions about what the interns observed in the elementary classrooms, provide assistance with the interns' assignments from the university, and work with the interns to help the interns assume teaching responsibilities in the classroom with individual students, with groups of students, and with the whole class.

5. Provide feedback to the interns. Mentor teachers and the principal also provide important feedback to the interns about the performance of the intern on the expected outcomes of the PDS program. Mentor teachers provide formative information to interns as they interact daily in the classroom and in required weekly conferences. Summative information is provided in evaluations at the midterm and end of each semester. In addition, interns participated in mock employment interviews with the William Allen White principal and with an Emporia State University faculty member and were provided with personalized feedback designed to assist the interns in the employment process.

Role of the PDS Coordinator in Creating and Maintaining the PDS Community

Although PDS interns share many professional and personal characteristics, each intern is a unique individual with experiences and insights which differ markedly from other interns. Creating and maintaining a professional community among interns who come from diverse backgrounds does not occur without considerable focused effort on the part of the PDS coordinator. Following are strategies for the coordinator to use in building and maintaining community among PDS interns:

1. **Begin by having interns share individual goals, expectations, concerns. Interns will discover initially that they share many of the same goals and aspirations, as well many of the same anxieties and concerns, about the PDS program.**

2. **Provide structured opportunities for group building. Group building has two primary goals: to allow interns to become acquainted with each other in pairs and other small group settings and to allow the facilitator to observe initial group and individual functioning. (See Lyman and Foyle, 1997).**

3. **Observe the group as the interns work together to determine cooperation skills which may need to be taught if the group is to function effectively together. Such skills may include: encouraging each other, active listening, accepting differences of opinion, and sharing tasks appropriately. (See Lyman, Foyle, and Azwell, 1993, pps. 39-40).**

4. **Observe individuals as they work together in group activities to determine:**

   A. **Which interns take an active leadership role?**

   B. **Which interns appear to be shy or reticent?**

C. Which interns appear to be skilled at getting along with others?

D. Which interns (if any) do not appear to get along well with others?

E. Which interns have good verbal skills?

F. Which interns appear to be well organized?

G. Which interns appear to be good listeners?

H. Which interns appear to have a good academic or experiential background for the Professional Development School?

5. Provide opportunities for the interns to share experiences in and out of the Professional Development School setting. Regular opportunities for sharing in class sessions is an important part of the PDS experience. Interns share their observations and perceptions of the classrooms in which they are working to provide additional contexts for other interns to utilize to understand methods courses and teaching in general. Opportunities to visit other schools and to take "field trips" outside of the PDS site enrich the interns' experience and provide opportunities for bonding among interns.

6. Encourage collaboration among the interns on assignments for the Professional Development School. Some interns have little experience in working with others on assignments, so providing appropriate experiences in positive interdependence serves as a model of the collegiality interns will hopefully display in their own classrooms and schools.

7. Facilitate celebration of individual and group successes and benchmarks such as birthdays. Rituals build a community culture of shared experiences which enhances

the experience for all participants.

8. Assign leadership roles to interns. In classroom teaching, PDS interns have been observed by a variety of educators including the Dean and Associate Dean of The Teachers College, professors from the University, candidates for employment as professors at the University, international students, and members of other college faculties. In addition, interns have been given the responsibility of presenting information about the PDS program to prospective interns and to faculties at other elementary schools interested in the PDS program. Interns have also presented as participants in panels at professional organization meetings.

9. Provide opportunities for group processing. At regular intervals, opportunities need to be provided to discuss questions such as: How far have we come? What do we want to remember? Where do we want to go from here?

Role of the PDS Interns in Creating and Maintaining the PDS Community

No community can be viable unless its members are actively involved in its creation and maintenance. Interns help to create the community by being open to others who come from different backgrounds and who may have different learning styles and personalities. While time is perhaps the most precious commodity for interns in the PDS program, the interns support the community by taking the time to interact together to accomplish PDS outcomes. Just as important, however, is the willingness of interns to take the time to meet together socially to nurture and sustain each other. In this way, lasting professional and personal friendships are formed.

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